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ABSTRACT

This paper, presented at the "Ingenium 2000" conference, reports an attempt by the Natal Education Department in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, to design, develop, and implement a curriculum extension program to meet the intellectual and/or other needs of the exceptionally able, with no additional provision of staff or facilities. The program's policy guidelines were established by an advisory committee of the education department, and focus on participant identification, program design and development at the individual school level, and teacher preparation. At the primary level, the ideal curriculum extension program takes place during an activity period. Curriculum extension at the junior secondary level uses the "pull-out" approach or individualized enrichment within the classroom. The senior secondary level emphasizes acceleration rather than enrichment. To assist teachers in identifying children for the extension program and in preparing stimulus materials, a local college of education is developing video "learning units" as well as a program for the teaching of thinking. A final comment notes that it is important that education planners and advisers be flexible in developing curriculum extension programs. (JDD)

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PRESENTATION :

A talk with the aid of prepared overhead transparencies, slides and video film. A detailed handout will be provided for the members of the audience.

CONTENT :

This is a report on a practical attempt by an education department to design, develop and implement a curriculum extension programme to meet the intellectual and/or other needs of less than 5 % of the school going population, taking into account the present financial restrictions imposed on education departments in South Africa. It is also an attempt to meet the needs of this small group of children while at the same time minimizing the problems associated with firstly, identification, and secondly, elitism. It is based largely upon the work of Joseph Renzulli and Belle Wallace and depends upon teacher interest and teacher participation.

Wallace

The Natal Education Department is a relatively small department providing education for approximately 60 000 children in 195 primary schools and 56 000 children in 72 high schools, with class sizes varying from 20 to 35 depending upon the size of the school, whether it is rural or urban, and the level being looked at (for example standard 1 or 10). Our approach towards provision for the needs of the exceptionally able is based upon a recognition of the following :

- The significance of the statistics mentioned above.
- No further provision of staff or facilities possible for the forseeable future because of monetary restrictions.
- There is no intention of creating special schools or even magnet classes for these children at this stage.
- The ultimate purpose of education is to provide opportunities for everyone to reach their level of self-actualization so that they may lead meaningful and purposeful lives as adults.

In 1977 an ad hoc committee was formed by the department and later it became a permanent advisory committee. Membership of the committee reflects all sections of the education department. The deliberations of the committee led to the following overall policy :

- Recognition of the fact that much good work in this direction has always taken place, e.g. teachers try to meet the needs of individual pupils; extension programmes take place in different subject areas and projects are carried out by schools and/or departments of education.
- The department's policy should be flexible so that individual schools can design a curriculum extension programme to suit their particular needs.
- Programme design should incorporate enrichment rather than acceleration, except for the last three years of schooling.
- Curriculum extension programming is an attempt to meet the present intellectual and/or other needs of the exceptionally able just as extra-mural and other activities meet the needs of specific groups of children in the school.
- All teachers should be aware of the needs of the exceptionally able.
- Programme design is an extension of the already well established thematic approach in the schools. The extension is achieved through the application of the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy to the chosen theme.
- At least some teachers in each school should be proficient in the design, development and implementation of curriculum extension programmes.

- It is the responsibility of each education department to provide opportunities for teachers to acquire the skills associated with the above points. This should be done through the provision of inservice courses and other supportive procedures such as regular visits to the schools by subject advisers and other departmental officials.

- Initially at least programme design and development precedes identification. This is to ensure that the teachers concerned are confident with the programme produced. These teachers form what is termed an Interest Group.

  Their initial task is to design a booklet for the guidance of the programme participants. Some form of relief must be given to the Interest Group in respect of the amount of work involved, for example, less other extra-mural work and/or responsibilities.

- The pupils doing the curriculum extension programme will be the responsibility of at least one of the teachers from the Interest Group. This person must focus on process as well as product, maximize problem solving procedures and seek the involvement of his pupils in arriving at solutions. He must encourage independent study, acting more as a resource person, and support the quest for knowledge. All this will be reflected in the content and style of the booklet. The curriculum extension programme teacher becomes a facilitator and co-ordinator of studies and activities.

- Curriculum extension material should be available to all professional staff within a department so that it can be modified for further use.

- Participation by the children is voluntary.

- The parent committee should be kept informed of developments and permission should be obtained from parents for their children's participation. The parent community should be encouraged to take part as well, under the guidance of teachers. They will also have to meet the costs pertaining to the programme.

- Curriculum extension provision is an ongoing dynamic process with the probability of new approaches and techniques developing.

- Curriculum extension programming has a role to play in the field of overall curriculum development.

<u>The ideal curriculum extension programme at the primary level</u>.

The ideal curriculum extension programme takes place during an activity period built into the school timetable, often a Thursday afternoon between 13h00 and 14h00. This does not mean that only this period of time will be used for extension. Rather, the time is used to stimulate research and other work that can take place at other times, for example, during school

when classwork is completed and at home. The activity period is pertinent in the sense that all the children of the school are involved in an activity of their choice, varying from macrame to dog handling to sports, depending upon the resources of the school and the parent and local community.

Identification of the children to take part in the curriculum extension programme is done by the teachers by means of the use of the Renzulli Triad (the emphasis being on above average cognitive ability, divergent thinking and task commitment), interest questionnaires, parental reports and teacher observations. The key question to be answered is : "To what extent will this extension programme meet the present intellectual and/or other needs of that specific child?" By this means a group of less than 5 % of the children are selected and parental consent is obtained. The children are informed that the programme will last approximately one quarter of the year that a new programme and theme will take place next quarter, with other groups of children participating. The extension group/s come/s from more than one standard and can be given a name, for example, the Eagles Club, Optica, etc.

The extension group/s usually work in the Resource Centre under the guidance of one or more of the Interest Group teachers and possibly parents. As the programme progresses during the weeks that follow a core group of youngsters will emerge, i.e. those that are truly gifted. The rest form a satellite group. The so called satellite group is comprised of children who, for one reason or another, are not coping with the programme.

The advantage of the above approach is that it de-emphasizes some of the negative aspects of extension programming, namely the labelling of some children as gifted, making inevitable mistakes with identification and having prescribed academically orientated courses which the children must follow, irrespective of their particular needs. It is a challenge to the teachers concerned, and an activity period, with an extension programme included, has a very positive effect on the overall ethos of the school. Of course, the teachers, the extension programme offered and the pupils taking part, can and should be changed from time to time.

If the school decides not to run an activity period there are a number of options open to it. The first is to use the "pull-out" method where the children come together at a specified time, again usually in the Resource Centre or a room designed for the curriculum extension programme. The second option is for the children to come together during a lunch period or after school, even in the evenings. Both options require some form of supervision. Another option is to provide individualized enrichment within the classroom situation provided that it is not just more classwork.

The junior secondary level

Curriculum extension at the junior secondary level necessitates the use of the "pull-out" approach and/or extension within the classroom based on the same principles mentioned earlier. The formation of out of school groups is also to be encouraged, especially if the latter are comprised of children from more than one school. Such groups meet on a regular basis and/or for a number of days during the holidays. They need not be restricted to a thematic approach, for example, a group of 8 students is presently designing a new road to eliminate a dangerous slope They are doing this with the aid of a firm of consulting civil engineers.

The senior secondary level

By the time the students reach the senior secondary phase acceleration should replace enrichment as a means of curriculum extension, and provision should be made for selected students to write all or part of their matriculation examination at an earlier stage. In South Africa UNISA courses are available to the students for further study. It is therefore possible for the students to remain at school while making a start with their university studies. They move on to the university campus at the same time as their peer group do. The universities should in turn recognise the credits gained by the students so that the latter do not have to waste time doing extra courses.

Research in progress

Because of the nature of the Natal Education Department's curriculum extension programme an initial common programme that could even be used within the normal classroom situation would be useful, both as a means of stimulus potential and for identifying children for other programmes as described above. For this reason research is being carried out by one of our colleges of education and some of our teachers on de Bono's CoRT material in order to devise a suitable programme for the teaching of thinking. It is conceivable that such a programme could become part of main language studies in the classroom.

The same college of education is also looking into the development of video 'learning units'. These are short video excerpts on a particular subject, sufficiently open ended to provide stimulus material for either normal classroom work or, with minor auditory modifications, curriculum extension. The use of these units would take some of the initial preparation load off the teachers and also help with identification. Different kinds of 'learning units' could be designed for the different school phases. These units could provide the same function as the modified CoRT material, namely to act as stimulus material and help with identification.

Final Comment

If curriculum extension programmes are going to find a permanent place in an existing educational structure they should meet the needs of both the children selected and the particular school

situation. It is therefore probably wise at this stage for education planners and advisers to maintain a flexible approach, remaining open to new ideas and developments and at the same time carrying out appropriate research within the school situation, with the help of local colleges of education and university education departments. A department's approach should also be reflected in its teacher education courses, both in initial and inservice training.

Curriculum extension has a very important bearing on overall curriculum development because it provides an opportunity for professional staff to go beyond existing syllabuses with children, so providing a practical opportunity to test the effectiveness of possible changes in the curriculum. All in all curriculum extension is an important concept in societies that experience rapid change, both for the children affected by it and the education departments concerned.

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